

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks Honoring the 2011 National Basketball Association Champion Dallas Mavericks

January 9, 2012

The President. Hello, everybody! Everybody please have a seat, have a seat. Welcome to the White House and congratulations to the world champion Dallas Mavericks. Obviously, we got some Texas people here.

This was the Mavericks' first title, so I want to start by recognizing everybody who stuck with the team through good times and through bad, from Don Carter, the original owner, to the arena staff, to all the fans back home.

We've got some Members of Congress who've waited a long time for this—[*laughter*—as well as my Trade Representative, Ron Kirk, who happens to be a former mayor of Dallas.

Of course, none of this would be possible if it hadn't been for the shy and retiring owner—[*laughter*—of the Dallas Mavericks, Mark Cuban. So not only did Mark help put together an outstanding group of players and coaches, he was also responsible for making this event happen today. And so we are thrilled to have you guys here.

It turns out that because of the lockout, Dallas wasn't scheduled to play in Washington this season. That did not sit well with Mark. [*Laughter*] He knew this team had worked hard. He wanted them to get all the perks of a world championship, including a visit to the White House. It is tough to say no to Mark Cuban. And so they made a separate trip and here we are.

And I'm glad it worked out, because this is a special group. Last season, they called themselves the "Bad News Bears" because from the very beginning nobody gave them much of a chance. People said that Jason Kidd was too old. And I will say that this is the first time I've been with some world champions who are my contemporaries. [*Laughter*] They said J.J. Barea was too small, that Dirk Nowitzki was too slow. They did say that, Dirk, I'm sorry. [*Laughter*] That's what they said. They said you had a great jump shot, but—[*laughter*]. They said DeShawn Stevenson was too crazy. [*Laughter*] They said "The JET" was terrific but they weren't sure whether that tattoo was such a good idea. [*Laughter*]

But these players got it done because they know how good teams win, not just by jumping higher or running faster, but by finding the open man, working together, staying mentally tough, being supportive of each other, playing smarter.

And that's how the Mavericks took down some of the league's best teams, including the Miami Heat, who got a little bit of attention last year. This was especially sweet for Dirk and Jason who were around the first time that the Mavericks and the Heat met in the finals and lost 5 years ago.

In fact, the Mavericks played—before the Mavericks played a single game last season, when Jason got his tattoo, he said, "When you do something as crazy as I did, you've got to back it up." And he did, by the way, score 27 points to help win the deciding game six.

Dirk joined the Mavericks 13 years ago as a skinny kid from Germany with what he describes as a goofy haircut. [*Laughter*] Last year he became the second European player ever to be named Finals MVP. And it wasn't easy. He bent a finger so badly in game two that he had to shoot left-handed. In game four, he played through a hundred and one degree fever. But

every time, he came through when it counted. And I think it's fair to say that we have very rarely seen a better playoff run than Dirk Nowitzki had last year. It was remarkable.

So clearly Dirk is a tough guy. Although the most painful thing may have been his rendition of "We Are the Champions"—[*laughter*—during the victory celebration. That was—[*laughter*—did you—you said you worked on that? [*Laughter*] Seriously? Okay.

Now, none of these players would have gotten so far without the rest of the folks on this stage. Obviously, Jason Kidd now has the second most assists and third most steals in NBA history. It wouldn't have worked without an outstanding coach. And Coach Rick Carlisle has now won a player as—or won a title as a player, with Larry Bird in the eighties, has a title as a coach, and then he just informed me that he had also won—what was it? The Pantoons? What were they called?

Rick Carlisle. The Patroons, the Albany Patroons.

The President. The Albany Patroons. Many of you did not know that Rick Carlisle had also won one of those. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Carlisle. It's minor league.

The President. It's a minor league team. [*Laughter*]

So these players and coaches will always share a bond that comes with being the best. And it's a bond they share with the Dallas community, where they do everything from setting up scholarships to helping military families get back on their feet. Today, in fact, they met with some wounded warriors here at the White House. I want to really thank them for taking the time to do that. That means so much to people.

So this team really does have a heart that's the size of Texas. This was a remarkable run, a great victory, a great vindication for all the effort Mark Cuban put into building this team, and for long-time players like Dirk Nowitzki and long-suffering fans like all of you. [*Laughter*]

And so I just want to give a heartfelt congratulations to all of you. I told them that it's too bad that next year it will be the Chicago Bulls here—[*laughter*—but they said I shouldn't be so confident. So congratulations, everybody. Give it up for the Dallas Mavericks.

Dirk, you got something for me?

Dirk Nowitzki. Yes.

[*At this point, the President was presented with a team jersey.*]

The President. That's it. That's what I'm talking about.

Mr. Nowitzki. That's it. I heard you're a big, big fan of Michael Jordan.

The President. Thank you so—well, you know, I was actually—I was 23 before Jordan.

Mr. Nowitzki. Oh, you were?

The President. I was. [*Laughter*] So he got the number from me, I think. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Nowitzki. He stole it.

The President. He stole it.

Mr. Nowitzki. Yes. I got you.

The President. That's what happened. That's beautiful.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Donald J. Carter, former owner, Mark Cuban, current owner, Richard P. Carlisle, head coach, Jason Kidd, Jose J. Barea, Jason E. "The JET" Terry, and DeShawn Stevenson, guards, and Dirk Nowitzki, forward, Dallas Mavericks; and former NBA players Larry J. Bird and Michael J. Jordan.

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